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Approved For Release 2004/06/14 : CIA-RDP80R01720R000400090049-2

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

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16 October 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR: Dr. Henry A. Kissinger
 Assistant to the President for
 National Security Affairs

SUBJECT : The Security Aspects of the Settlement Package --
 "Could the GVN Accept a Cease-fire In-Place"?

1. The Critical Ambiguity. The security ramifications of a cease-fire "in place" -- and a reasonable answer to the question of whether the GVN could, or would, accept such a cease-fire -- hinge very much on the operative definition of "in place." In short, whose maps are used -- Hanoi's, the GVN's, or even ours?
2. Current Enemy Deployments. At this writing, enemy forces throughout Military Regions (MRs) 1 and 2 remain basically deployed in the positions they have held for the past month or so. Heavy concentrations of Communist units are now located in Quang Tri Province, west of Hue, southwest of Danang, west of Tam Ky, and in the southern Quang Ngai-northern Binh Dinh areas. B-3 Front elements have been active in and are spread throughout Kontum and Pleiku Provinces. MRs 3 and 4 have seen the most significant

redeployments in the past week with the enemy inching closer to Saigon than at any time since the spring of 1968. Some 12 to 14 battalions have moved southward to positions north and northwest of the city while two regiments (one infantry and one artillery) remain to the east in Phuoc Tuy and Long Khanh. Additionally, in MR 4 three regiments have deployed east and northeast out of Base Area 470 in western Dinh Truong Province to positions threatening strategic Route 4 as well as Cai Lay and My Tho. The movement of a regiment from Kien Hoa to central Dinh Tuong further adds to the buildup south of Saigon. To the south, three regiments remain concentrated in Chuong Thien Province east of the U Minh Forest. (See the attached sketch maps for the four MRs.)

3. The Pattern of Current Activity. Present enemy force deployments would support a Communist claim to de facto control over considerable unpopulated territory in western MRs 1 and 2, plus a more arguable claim to enclaves in the populated lowlands of southern MR 1 and northern MR 2. In MRs 3 and 4, the picture is changing almost daily. The Communists have moved significant forces out of relatively isolated border sanctuaries and/or base areas and committed them to action in relatively close proximity to urban population concen-

trations. These most recent moves, coupled with previous enemy deployments, in MRs 3 and 4, could easily be presented as a loose encirclement of Saigon. Indeed, a literally construed current-situation "freeze" could be depicted as entailing a loose Communist encirclement of Saigon with the GVN's capital technically describable -- at this writing -- as an enclave island more or less surrounded by "PRG" territory. In terms of real political control such a depiction might be arrant nonsense -- and the GVN would certainly insist that it was -- but if one technically freezes "presence," narrowly defined, there is a current Communist "presence" on at least three sides of the capital, with some enemy units located less than twenty-odd miles from the Presidential Palace. Furthermore, the current location of Communist units put the enemy in an at least temporary position to harass the major lines of communication (both road and waterway) to and from the capital, and in a position to launch shelling and sapper attacks in and near the city. Also, Communist units are now in positions from which (until driven out) they could threaten Saigon's lifeline to the Mekong delta rice bowl by harassing Route 4 and its parallel waterways through Dinh Tuong and Long An.

4. Political and Security Impact. A freeze-type cease-fire at this moment, in short, would give the Communists at least

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some basis for claiming presence in, hence "control" over, roughly three quarters of Quang Tri Province, much of the uninhabited territory of western MR 1, the western parts of Kontum and Pleiku Provinces in MR 2, the northern half of Binh Long Province in MR 3, a portion of Dinh Tuong Province in MR 4 and certain enclaves in the lower delta (particularly in Chuong Thien Province and the U Minh Forest area). In addition, Hanoi would certainly make a strong pitch for "control" over a number of "leopard spots" in the populated coastal lowlands of southern MR 1 and northern MR 2. Finally, the Communists would certainly make rather sweeping demands for acknowledging their "control" of key populated areas near Saigon.

5. Hanoi's actual demands will be further shaped by the battlefield position on the day they are made. Even if we did not have a wealth of evidence to this effect (and we do), the current pattern of observed Communist activity would make it clear that at least one major objective of the Communists' October high point is to stake some form of supportable claim (however tenuous) to as much politically significant territory as possible against the contingency of an in-place cease-fire.

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6. The GVN might have been able -- and grudgingly willing -- to live with the de facto deployment situation just after the recapture of Quang Tri as the basis for a possible in-place cease-fire.

Thieu and his senior advisors, however, would never acquiesce in a freeze based literally on "present" positions. Instead -- when or if this topic was broached -- Thieu and his top aides would argue adamantly that it would be folly to freeze during the rising curve of an initiated enemy high point. Thieu would further contend (not without reason) that any such high point surge would be bound to crest and recede within "a few weeks" and that the optimum moment for tabling an in-place cease-fire proposal would be on the down curve of the Communists' short term activity cycle, i. e., as Communist forces were withdrawing to their base areas. Should the U.S. try to insist on tabling such an offer "now," our relations with Thieu would swiftly become severely strained.

7. The Larger Perspective. As with most potential developments in Vietnam -- and more so than many -- the net political impact of a cease-fire situation cannot be reduced to lines on a map or numbers

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in a table. The overall impact, hence net political consequences, would hinge very much on what the contending parties -- Communist, anti-Communist, and any "plague on both your houses" elements -- construed as the symbolic meaning, not just of the literal cease-fire agreement but of the way it was reached and implemented. Whether any given set of cease-fire agreements redounded to one side's advantage or the other's, therefore, would be at least partially determined by how this somewhat incoherent jury of local observers formed its verdict of the cease-fire's symbolic portent; for this would be a verdict or prognosis that would tend to become self-confirming if subscribed to by a broad enough spectrum of the local population.

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